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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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I hope that your holiday was an enjoyable one! It was nice and quiet around here this year. We were supposed to visit my in-laws for dinner, but as usual, the local weather prognosticators were wrong! We knew that we were in for a nor'easter. The forecast called for the storm to start at daybreak, and progressively get worse. So, we decided not to travel to Boston, figuring that the storm would make driving hazardous. Naturally, the storm didn't start around here until late in the afternoon! So, we stayed at home, opened our gifts, and enjoyed them for most of the day. Oh, the one thing that the weather people did get right was the intensity of the storm. It was wet and windy; and we did get the ten inches or so of snow that they predicted. The snow took out a few of my pine tree branches, which, in turn, took down our cable television wires (but didn't knock our cable out!). The snow was that ugly wet and heavy stuff; the snowthrower had a tough time of it, but it was better than shovelling and knocking my back out!

The new desk is in the house and re-built. It's a beauty! Looks better than the online pictures depicted! Already it's cluttered, but that will improve as I find the right places for things. The new big-screen TV is wonderful, too. I'm looking forward to seeing a few movies on the "big screen"! "Lord of the Rings" should be terrific! We got a bunch of nice things, but not a lot this year. I'm sure we blew our gift budget with those two high-priced gifts! But, a few DVDs, a couple of video games, the proverbial mandatory clothes, and a few other things rounded out the lists. We'll probably pick up a few items over the next week or so that we forgot about in all of the holiday rush. Even the dogs got their share of goodies!

Last week I mentioned that this issue would be our last issue for 2002, and the completion of four years of publication. I'm still amazed that A-ONE is still around. Both Joe and I started out in late 1990, writing a few pieces for Ralph Mariano's STReport online magazine. Over time, the both of us had more and more regular contributions to that magazine, as well as a few of the paper magazines that were still around at the time. Neither of us were programmers, but we both wanted to be more than just Atari users. We both got so much out of being users that we wanted to try and give something back. Writing seemed to click for both of us. We met each other at various WAACE shows, as well as the Connecticut AtariFests during the waning days of both. We conducted seminars, and gave a few "speeches" at a number of these shows. We complemented each other well.

STReport opened a lot of doors for us, and closed many others! That was

fine. We didn't write for Atari, we wrote about them. While many resented the fact that everything we wrote about our "beloved" company wasn't positive, many appreciated it. There were always battles in the mag, in the Atari forums on GEnie, CompuServe, and Delphi. There were disagreements out in

the public, especially at the various shows. The "competing" magazines had their own views. It was fun. There were plenty of battles with Bob Brodie and his hangers-on. Developers were split for logical reasons, but many were "closet" supporters. It was fun. It kept people on their toes. And many people took it way too seriously!

We stayed with STReport for quite a few years. STReport was moving away from its Atari roots and moving in directions that neither of us wanted to go. During the early months of 1999, Joe and I decided to venture out on our own, and Atari Online News, Etc. was born. We kept our online format in the familiar style of STReport (with Ralph's blessing). Joe and I both knew that publishing a lot of Atari news and articles was going to be an almost impossibility. Let's face it, there's not a plethora of "all things Atari" happening. Nor do we have the time and resources to really research heavily to track down the news. We've tried to rely on the internet, the Atari newsgroups, and our readers to gather news. And, it's usually slim pickins' to say the least. But, we keep on.

The rest of the magazine is made up of gaming news of interest, as well as computing technology and other related news articles. We realize, as do our readers, that most of us supplement our computing needs with PCs and Macs. So this kind of news is interesting to all of us. We had hoped to build some interesting databases, such as a comprehensive list of Atari software, etc. - but it just hasn't happened.

Overall, it's been a fun four years. We haven't missed a single issue yet; and we're weekly (for those of you who aren't aware of that feat!). We're ready to begin our fifth year of publication. How long will we keep going? Your guess is as good as ours. But as I mentioned last week, it's the people like you - our readers - who make it all worthwhile. While we don't get tons of e-mail, the ones that we do get have been extremely supportive and grateful. And we're grateful to hear these things. More than anything, those letters of support really keep us motivated to keep A-ONE coming out week after week. And for that, we appreciate it.

We hope that you all have an enjoyable and safe new year. If you have plans for New Year's Eve, please be responsible. If you're going to drink, please do not get behind the wheel of a car. Happy New Year!

Until next time...

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HighWire 0.1.0 Released

The HighWire Development Team would like to wish everyone in the Atari community a Merry Christmas and we hope you enjoy your present from us.

A year after the initial public release of the HighWire project, we are happy to inform you that version 0.1.0 is available for your download and

enjoyment.

What’s new in HighWire 0.1.0?

’Unofficial’ online use. It’s not finished and mainly for testing. But the adventurous can give it a try.

Source code has been modified to make it’s use in other projects easier.

Complete Unicode support for TrueType fonts

A real history function per window, also available from menu bar (better than in NetScape 4.x)

Partial functionality of FORMs

Smaller memory foot print for documents in memory

New functionality for browsing the local file system (directory listing), sortable by name/date/size.

Meta tag for "refresh" implemented, even if the refresh time will always be taken as ’0’ yet (scheduler limitation).

A large number of rewrites removing an equally large number of bugs.

To download and more information, visit the HighWire website http://highwire.atari-users.net

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This issue wraps up our fourth year of publishing A-ONE. As Dana said last week, it’s kind of hard to imagine that we’ve been at this for that long already. It’s been a great ride so far, and I look forward to doing it for at least a while longer. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed being associated with Atari computers, Atari users, and A-ONE Magazine for all these years. I’ve learned a lot about computers, about people, and even about myself... all while I’ve been having a heck of a good time. How can you beat that?

On another note, Christmas has come and gone and, as is usually the case, I’ve got more ’stuff’ that I’ve got to find room for.

Not that I’m complaining, mind you. Being a child of this particular society, I love ’stuff’. I don’t measure success or prowess of any kind by the amount of stuff (as some do), but I’ve got to be honest... I like stuff. All kinds of stuff.

I’m one of those annoying people who find just about everything interesting. My wife often shakes her head when something catches my

fancy and I just stop in the middle of whatever I’m doing to watch or think about what’s going on.

I’ve got a little shelf of ’toys’ (ie: silly ’stuff’) in our living room stocked with some of the things that I’ve accumulated over the years. Magnetic things hold my interest... not because the principles are beyond comprehension or because the toys themselves are complex or even especially useful. It’s because they do unusual things... things that you wouldn’t expect "normal" objects to do.

On the face of it, most of us understand that magnets do what they do because the atoms in the material are positioned so that one side of the object has a positive ’charge’ and the other side has a negative ’charge’. Since opposites attract and like charges repel, you can make magnetized items move as if there was some sort of magical force field between them. In fact, a ’force field’ is exactly what it is.

All of this is learned by school children at an early age. Who hasn’t taken a magnet and run it through a handful of sand to glean iron particles from it?

For most of us, it’s enough to know that there IS a magnetic force and that this force can be harnessed and used.

I grew tired of "mining" iron from sand, but magnetism has always fascinated me. Ask a physicist how magnetism works, and he or she will pretty much tell you the same as any prepubescent student will. Ask them HOW the force is transmitted, where it comes from, or why it appears at all, and they’ll start talking about tensor field dynamics and electro-weak interactions and things like that. Ask them again, and they’ll probably say, "It just IS", and leave it at that.

The bottom line... and the reason I’m even mentioning this... is that we just have to take some things on faith. There are lots of things like that around us these days. The fact that I can’t envision the forces or how they are transmitted obviously doesn’t mean that magnetism doesn’t exist, right? It just means that I don’t need to understand the deepest levels of everything.

I don’t know about you, but that’s always ticked me off. I WANT to understand things, to be able to envision what goes on at the deepest levels of matter and energy. It feels incomplete to just say, "It just IS". I guess I’m just a perpetual five year old, constantly asking, "but why?"

Another one of my favorite toys, much to my wife’s consternation, is a "Newtonian Demonstrator". Even if you don’t recognize the name, you’ve seen one. It’s one of those frames with five or six steel balls suspended by strings or wires. You move a number of balls away from the others and release them. They slam into the remaining balls and a number of balls equal to the number of balls that you moved go shooting off from the other end, only to fall back into the other balls and send the original number off again. The force goes back and forth like this until gravity (for the most part) drains away the energy you added when you released the balls in the first place, making that "clack, clack, clack, clack" noise.

This interaction was explained by Sir Isaac Newton, thus the name of the device. Now THIS one I can wrap my mind around. I can SEE the interaction, so I can understand what’s going on, right?

Wrong. I don’t actually see any more of this interaction than I do with my magnetic puzzles. But it’s dealing with actual physical objects... the steel balls... and the energy that I added by swinging the balls, so I THINK I understand it more.

That’s probably what happens with all of us on a daily basis. You get to understand what will happen if you do something, and that’s as far as your understanding needs to go. There are those of us who routinely ask why or how such-and-such happens. I’m one of those. It doesn’t make me special, by any means. Confucius said, "A fool can ask more questions than a wise man can answer". And by the powers that be, I AM that fool! <grin>

The special ones are the Galilaeos, Newtons, Einsteins, Bohrs, and Hawkings. They’re the ones that not only ask questions and offer answers, but can actually envision these things. They, and their like who are yet to come, are the ones that will shape our future.

And me? I just want to watch my magnetic pendulum swing to and fro and move at crazy angles as I let my mind wander.

Let’s get to the news and stuff from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Brian Roland asks about a popular MIDI/music app:

"Has anyone succeeded in getting Avalon to run on a Falcon?
If so, how?

Needless to say, this works just fine on my Mega 4 connected to MMA_SDS devices.

I have version 1.1, of course with the dongle. What is the latest version?

Any time I attempt to launch Avalon 1.1 on the Falcon I get the message: "Can not load mros*.*"

I’ve tried ST High mode...with and without CT2b turbo enabled.

I did try swapping out the mros to the 3_45 version with CAF (and of course the CT2b patched version of 3_45 as well), and every other version I’ve been able to get my hands on...none working in any Falcon mode.

Also, I grabbed an archive from the steinberg ftp site called avalon21.zip. This package does not run on EITHER of my machines. A garbled screen is tossed up and it says, ’Can not load img file’.

J.J. van de Gruiter tells Brian:

"No, I’ve got the same experiences as you. 2.1 is the latest version.

That file is corrupt and Steinberg doesn’t care since many people wrote them. I’ve got a dongle version 2.0 and 2.1. If you’re interested I can mail them."

Paul Calillet adds:

"You can also download it at:
http://music-atari.org/music/download/ "

Brian tells Paul:

"Either my dongle doesn't work with this version, or it is corrupted.
I get the same behavior as the archive from the ftp.steinberg.com archive.
Upon launching, the startup screen is messy and it says, 'Can not load img'."

'Jaques' asks about moving files from ST floppies to PC:

"Does anyone know of a program that can copy the files from TOS floppies
(created on a Mega ST2) to a PC. When I open such a floppy, the PC asks me
to format the floppy and I want to copy the songs I created in the early
90's to my PC with VST on. I know, this might be not the best place to
say that I want to use my PC instead of my Mega ST.

Can someone please help me here. I tried Gemulator 2000 (only sees empty
floppies) and the Gemxplor (this will take ages to copy file by file. The
only solution I see is to copy every floppy to the Megafile and then copy
to a dos formatted disk, but this will take a while."

David Wade tells Jaques:

"If you still have the Mega then it is the best place to make the copies.

1. Format a spare 720k disk on the PC.
2. Take that disk to the MEGA and then copy the files from your ST floppies
to the new disk.
3. Then the disk to the PC and copy across.

There is also a TOS tool (so it runs on the Mega) that will adjust the
formatting of a TOS disk to make it PC compatible, but I can't remember
its name.

Other solutions include PARCP http://joy.sophics.cz/parcp/ or a proper
network connection."

In Gemulator you need to turn of DOS access to the floppies. I can't
remember where it sets that, but turn it off and it will work."

Ken Springer adds:

"Years ago, Double Click Software wrote a little program that simply
wrote the necessary DOS info to the correct sectors on the floppy. I
don't remember if the disk had to be blank or not."

Peter West adds another option:

"There is also the PD 'DISKMOD.TOS', the ST to IBM Disk modifier,
used with 'BLOCK0.DAT' that contains the actual IBM-style boot
sector to be written. This can be used with existing Atari
pre-TOS 1.04 disks and does not affect any files on them. The
program dates back to 1986 and was written in Personal Pascal by
J D Eisenberg. It's under 7 kB for the executable plus 512 bytes for
BLOCK0.DAT."

Djordje Vukovic mentions another emulator:

"Another ST emulator, TosBox, has an option for using tos-formatted

floppy disks (TosBox would not see it as drive A or B, but as another drive which has to be specially defined in the INI file). Within some limits (i.e. if the floppy does not have some weird format such as 84 tracks x 11 sectors) this may work."

Brian Roland pops in and provides some links:

"Oh, I almost forgot to mention this utility as well.

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/atari-midi/files/Unidrive.zip

Grab this free GEMXPLOR utility (the first url is the page it can be found on, the second url is a direct link to the GEM Explorer utility). BTW, this utility can also look at an ST hard drive connected to your PC (usually requires a SCSI host on your PC).

http://www.emulators.com/download.htm
http://www.emulators.com/freefile/gemxplor.zip

Launch it on your PC...
Stick the ST made disk in your floppy drive...
Browse the floppy and drag the files you want to where-ever you want it on your PC.

That’s the simple way ;)

Other method...
Is to format a DOUBLE DENSITY disk on your PC, then use the ST to move the files to this new disk."

John Garone asks for opinions on what hard drive to get for his Falcon:

"I can use some ideas on the best brand of IDE drive for a Falcon running with a 32/50 Phantom SE and booting with HDDriver. I usually only run TOS 4.04 (no multitasking) and I believe I can get 16, 1 gig partitions on an SCSI drive.

So, some things come to mind like:
- Is it 16 for an IDE?
- Is a new Seagate (or other) IDE faster than a 1996 Seagate SCSI?
- Does the Falcon limit speed?
- Can a Seagate IDE ATA 100/66/33 interface be used?
- What type of cable is needed? "

Dr. Uwe Seimet tells John:

"The number of partitions is not related to the hard disk type. It’s just a matter of the operating system. With plain TOS 4.04 you can never have more than 16 partitions.

The speed of the hard drive does not matter, as any drive is faster than the Falcon. In other words it will always be the Falcon that limits speed.

Yes, a Seagate IDE ATA 100/66/33 interface can be used.

A standard IDE cable is needed. No need to get special IDE DMA cables as the Falcon does not support any kind of IDE DMA anyway."

This is probably covered elsewhere in the issue, but I’ll mention it here anyway..

Dan Ackerman posts:

"The HighWire Development Team would like to wish everyone in the Atari community a Merry Christmas and we hope you enjoy your present from us.

A year after the initial public release of the HighWire project, we are happy to inform you that version 0.1.0 is available for your download and enjoyment.

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New functionality for browsing the local file system (directory listing), sortable by name/date/size.

Meta tag for "refresh" implemented, even if the refresh time will always be taken as ’0’ yet (scheduler limitation).

A large number of rewrites removing an equally large number of bugs.

To download and more information, visit the HighWire website http://highwire.atari-users.net "

John Garone tells Dan:

"Looks like it’s come a long way! Pages come up clean now."

Edward Baiz adds:

"I will say also that it works fine, as it is, with my EtherNet setup."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Please remember to act responsibly on New Year’s Eve. Please don’t drink and drive. Remember: The life you save may be MINE!

C’mon back next week for more news and my... ummm... unique point of view. I’m sure that I’ll have something to rant about by then. But until then, keep on listening to what they’re saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Tale of the Scooby Doos!
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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
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Different Problems Dog Two ’Scooby-Doo’ Games

A pair of new "Scooby-Doo" games, based on the cartoon classic, show how two software companies can take the same concept and come up with products that are very different in style and quality.

Case in point: "Scooby-Doo: Night of 100 Frights" for GameCube and PlayStation 2 and "Scooby-Doo! Case File #1: The Glowing Bug Man" for Windows computers.

For those who have been trapped on a deserted island for the last 33 years, Scooby-Doo is a cartoon series featuring four teenagers who solve mysteries. Most of these involve supernatural and X-Files-type phenomena that, like in real-life, turn out to have a not-so-supernatural explanation.

They are accompanied by an easily-spooked Great Dane named Scooby-Doo, whose name reputedly was inspired by the "Scooby-Dooby-Doo" at the end of Frank Sinatra’s rendition of "Strangers in the Night."

The program debuted on CBS, jumped to ABC, and is now on the Cartoon Network. It inspired this summer’s live action movie, where Scooby was a computer-generated character.

"Glowing Bug Man," the Learning Company’s version of the game, is named after the monster stalking the Kudzula County Museum of Natural History. As soon as Scooby and the humans arrive, they are attacked by the creature.

While seeking refuge in the museum, they meet a security guard who thinks the Bug Man is really a person and he has five suspects, who include the maintenance man and the museum director. It’s the player’s job to find clues that implicate someone.

The game, for ages 5 to 10, is a big disappointment, partly because the animation is so sparse, partly because the puzzles players need to solve don’t make a lot of sense.

For example, the Bug Man has stolen the head of a T-Rex and put it in a storeroom filled with crates. To get it out, you have to move some of the crates to clear the way, but without moving any crates out of the room.

It’s a variation on the old valet parking puzzle. But as soon as you solve it the first time, the game inexplicably makes players go back and solve it twice more before you can earn your clue.

How much more trouble would it have been to declare that other parts of the dinosaur’s skeleton were missing as well, so there would be a legitimate excuse to make the players complete the puzzle multiple times?

I discovered, after earning three of the five clues, that the Bug Man was the museum cook, Billy Seasons. Unfortunately, I couldn’t accuse him. I had to solve all the other puzzles before I had a chance to nail the culprit and hear him say, as culprits always do, "And I would have gotten away with it, too, if it weren’t for you meddling kids and your pesky dog."

If you replay the game, other suspects turn out to be the Bug Man.

"Glowing Bug Man" doesn’t have a lot of depth. There are fewer places to visit, and fewer activities than many other games for this age group. Even with its relatively inexpensive price tag of $20, if you’re looking for a game that delivers good educational value, this Scooby-Doo doesn’t.

In contrast, "Scooby-Doo! Night of 100 Frights" is miles above "Bug Man." Instead of a flat, two-dimensional game, this $40 product is rendered in three dimensions.

"100 Frights" doesn’t pretend to have any educational value. It’s an arcade game with floating coins to collect, gaps to leap, ramps to climb, and secret passageways to locate. At one point, when you venture into the playground, Scooby can jump up and grab onto a rope, swinging erratically -- and comically -- back and forth.

The game focuses on a haunted mansion that is home to Professor Alexander Graham (voiced by comic Tim Conway), who has mysteriously disappeared. Soon after the start of the game, the four teens vanish as well. Only Scooby is left behind, and players must take him through the mansion and a nearby fishing village to solve the mystery, with occasional advice from a groundskeeper voiced by Don Knotts. British actor Tim Curry provides the voice for a third character.

"100 Frights" has some cute touches, such as the ability to spit bubble gum at an enemy to immobilize him, or to use bunny slippers to let players slip past enemies without being seen.

Two problems dog "100 Frights."

I wish there were a way to change your vantage point as you view the action. It can be difficult to see where you’re going because the camera doesn’t swing around and let you see everything. But that’s just a minor complaint.

The second drawback appears early and will plague you throughout the game -- "100 Frights" has a laugh track. And not a "Drew Carey" kind of laugh track where you hear real people laughing in response to real humor.

This is one of those fingernail-scraping-across-the-blackboard kind of laugh tracks where prerecorded laughs are played when nothing really funny is happening on the screen, such as every time Scooby stops running and skids to a stop, which will be VERY often, if you’re playing right.

THQ should have designed it so this part of the game could be muted. It’s

a huge distraction for an adventure that’s still five times the fun and technical sophistication of "Bug Man," even though it’s twice the price.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft Ordered to Carry Sun’s Java

Sun Microsystems Inc. won a major antitrust ruling against Microsoft Corp. on Monday when a federal judge ordered Microsoft to distribute Sun’s Java programming language in its Windows operating system.

U.S. District Judge J. Frederick Motz handed down the preliminary injunction at Sun’s request, saying it was needed to roll back "market conditions in which (Microsoft) is unfairly advantaged."

Motz said there was a "substantial" likelihood the court will impose the condition permanently.

He called the injunction "an elegantly simple remedy" aimed at preventing Microsoft’s past wrongs from giving it an advantage in the market battle for Internet-based computing.

"I further find it is an absolute certainty that unless a preliminary injunction is entered, Sun will have lost forever its right to compete, and the opportunity to prevail, in a market undistorted by its competitor’s antitrust violations," Motz said in the 42-page opinion.

Microsoft spokesman Jim Desler said the company will ask for an appeal of the ruling "on an expedited basis."

The preliminary injunction in the private antitrust suit will remain in effect while the case is either tried or settled.

Sun’s antitrust lawsuit, which also seeks at least $1 billion in damages, is one of several currently before Motz that have been filed in the wake of Microsoft’s long-running antitrust fight with the government.

A settlement of the government suit was endorsed by U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly last month, although Massachusetts and West Virginia are appealing.

Sun contends Microsoft sabotaged its Java software to fend off a threat to its Windows monopoly.

During preliminary court hearings early in December, Motz likened Microsoft’s behavior toward Sun to the 1994 knee-clubbing of Olympic skater Nancy Kerrigan, when she was assaulted by the ex-husband of rival skater Tonya Harding. He also likened Microsoft, which had promoted an incompatible form of Java that worked best on Windows and had taken other

steps to hinder Java, to a baseball team that had stolen game signals from the other side, Motz said.

Motz, at those preliminary hearings, consistently voiced sympathy for leveling the playing field between Sun's Java and Microsoft's .Net Internet services software.

Santa Clara, California-based Sun claims that Microsoft views Sun's Java software as a threat because it can run on a variety of operating systems, not just on Microsoft's Windows.

Sun charges Microsoft has tried to sabotage Java by a series of actions, most recently dropping it from Windows XP, which was introduced last year.

Microsoft later reversed itself and said it would start including Java in a Windows XP update, but only until 2004.

Sun filed its antitrust lawsuit in March this year, after a federal appeals court in 2001 upheld a lower court ruling in the government case that Microsoft had broken U.S. antitrust laws and illegally maintained its monopoly in PC operating systems.

Motz also is overseeing cases filed by AOL Time Warner unit Netscape Communications, Be Inc. and Burst.com, as well as cases filed by class-action attorneys who are suing on behalf of consumers.

White House: Web Security Plan Won't Invade Privacy

Efforts to bolster Internet security will not lead to increased government scrutiny of individuals' online habits, the White House and industry sources said on Friday.

As it finalizes sweeping guidelines that aim to increase cybersecurity, the Bush administration said individual privacy would not be affected by efforts to prevent cyberattacks.

"The administration is not considering a proposal to monitor what individuals do on the Internet," a spokesman for the transition to the newly created Department of Homeland Security said.

High-tech companies, meanwhile, said they would resist government efforts to get involved in the day-to-day operation of the global computer network.

In a set of preliminary guidelines released in September, the White House said high-tech companies that keep an eye on the Internet should combine their efforts and work with the government to better defend against computer viruses, worms and other cyberattacks.

The New York Times in its Friday edition reported the White House is planning a bigger government role in the proposed center that could possibly lead to surveillance of individual users.

But high-tech sources who had been briefed on the updated plans said they were not aware of any such change, and White House Cybersecurity czar Richard Clarke assured high-tech firms the government only wanted them to set up an "early warning system" to keep an eye on the health of the Internet

"This early warning system would, if companies chose to create it, involve only highly aggregated information on the overall health of the Internet," Clarke said in a letter.

Internet infrastructure firms such as ATT the system could not be used to ferret out members of al Qaeda or other militant groups.

The head of a high-tech trade group said government involvement in this system is not needed as these companies are already in constant communication with each other.

"They already do it just fine, they don't need government help," said Harris Miller, president of the Information Technology Association of America. "There are so many people monitoring the system that nothing's going to fall through the cracks."

The system may be more like highway traffic cameras that watch for accidents rather than individual police stops, but government involvement is still worrisome, said Stewart Baker, former general counsel to the National Security Agency, who now represents Internet service providers.

"Even if they're only able to do the sorts of searches you'd expect a network operating center to be able to do, it still raises these questions," Baker said. "When do they leave the room?"

Internet service providers -- which do handle individual communications -- are not likely to cooperate with government surveillance efforts unless commanded by court order, an industry source said, because it would discourage people from using the Internet.

A spokesman for America Online said the company had not seen the revised guidelines and thus could not comment, but said the popular access provider would work to balance privacy with security.

Privacy experts said they were not familiar with the revised version of the security plan, which is expected to be released early next year.

Man Pleads Guilty to Writing Viruses

A U.K. man pleaded guilty on Friday to charges that he wrote and distributed three Internet computer viruses from his home in Wales with the intention of causing unauthorized modifications to computer systems.

Simon Vallor, 22, admitted in Bow Street Magistrates' Court in London that he created the viruses called "Gokar," "Admirer," and "Redesi," a spokesperson for the court said Tuesday.

Vallor was arrested in February and charged under Section 3 of the U.K.'s Computer Misuse Act 1990.

According to court prosecutors, the viruses that were created and spread, in part through chat rooms, by Vallor were detected in 42 countries and affected 27,000 computer systems, the spokesperson said.

Vallor was released on bail until his next court date for sentencing is set sometime next year, the spokesperson said.

After having received e-mails infected with the viruses at its office in Baltimore, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation tipped off Scotland Yard detectives in London who subsequently tracked Vallor down though his British Telecommunications Internet access account registered to his home address, the spokesperson said.

Ex-Computer Hacker Granted Radio License

A man the federal government once labeled "the most wanted computer criminal in U.S. history" has won a long fight to renew his ham radio license and next month can resume surfing the Internet.

Kevin Mitnick, 39, of Thousand Oaks, Calif., served five years in federal prison for stealing software and altering data at Motorola, Novell, Nokia, Sun Microsystems and the University of Southern California. Prosecutors accused him of causing tens of millions of dollars in damage to corporate computer networks.

Mitnick was freed in January 2000. The terms of his probation, which expire Jan. 20, require he get government permission before using computers, software, modems or any devices that connect to the Internet. His travel and employment also are limited.

Mitnick has been allowed to use a cell phone for a couple of years and received permission this year to type a manuscript on a computer not connected to the Internet.

"Not being allowed to use the Internet is kind of like not being allowed to use a telephone," Mitnick said Thursday in a phone interview.

Mitnick said he is starting a firm to help companies protect themselves from computer attacks. He said the end of his probation will allow him to do hands-on work.

Christopher Painter, deputy chief of the Justice Department’s computer crime section and the former assistant U.S. attorney who prosecuted Mitnick, said that once the former hacker’s probation is over, he won’t be subject to any special surveillance.

"Not any more than anyone else would," Painter said. He added that "if there’s any indication that anyone is engaged in illegal conduct, we’re going to look into that."

Mitnick led the FBI on a three-year manhunt that ended in 1995 when agents collared him in an apartment in Raleigh, N.C., with the help of a top security expert. During the chase, Mitnick continued breaking into computer networks and became a cult hero among hackers.

Mitnick applied to renew his ham radio license in 1999, while still in prison. The Federal Communications Commission ordered a hearing, citing that Mitnick at one time was "the most wanted computer criminal in U.S. history."

FCC Administrative Law Judge Richard Sippel granted the license in a ruling made public Monday.

"He started hacking as an inquisitive teenager and wound up a disgraced felon," Sippel wrote. "There is reliable evidence that Mr. Mitnick has focused on becoming an honest, productive citizen."

Mitnick said he was pleased with the decision.

"We put on a good case to show the FCC that I'm sorry for my past actions," he said.

Mitnick, who began using ham radios when he was 13, said it cost him more than $16,000 in legal expenses to convince the FCC to renew his license. Typical renewals are free. "It's the most expensive amateur radio license in the world," Mitnick said.

Since his release from prison, Mitnick has appeared on television, as an expert witness in the courtroom and before Congress, offering advice about computer security. He also wrote a book, "The Art of Deception," which was published in October and describes scenarios where tricksters dupe computer network administrators into revealing security details.

Vendors Blocks Pop-Ups, Spam, And Viruses

Separate technologies introduced last week are designed to help Internet users block pop-up ads, spam, and viruses.

Aladdin Systems released Internet Cleanup 3.0, blocking pop-up ads, Web bugs, banner ads, and removing spyware, tracking devices, unwanted cookies, and ActiveX controls. The software works with Microsoft Internet Explorer and e-mail in-boxes. Its retail price is $29.99.

Ikano Communications introduced MailRover Anti-Spam & Virus Protection 2.0 screening service, which incorporates Brightmail spam and virus protection and Symantec technology. End-users can view an online mailbox -- the "Doghouse Database" -- containing suspected spam.

MailRover can detect random characters inserted by spammers in the header or body of an e-mail message, designed to foil spam filters that search for e-mail messages that are character-for-character identical to known spam.

Sales Tax on Internet May Help States

As states across the country struggle with deficits well into the billions, many officials are beginning to eye sales taxes on online shopping - which may seem like chump change but could spare countless small government programs.

In California alone, such taxes could raise at least $200 million yearly. Nationally, local and state governments could add billions to their coffers.

"We can no longer ignore an entire segment of the retail marketplace," said Pat Leary, lobbyist for the California State Association of Counties and a frequent online shopper herself.

Internet shopping is expected to climb to $40 billion this year, from last year’s $30 billion, according to New York-based Jupiter Research. It could reach $105 billion within five years.

This year’s tally includes $10 billion for computers and accessories, $4.7 billion for clothes and $2.8 billion for books, and much of that is untaxed.

Collecting sales taxes won’t be easy, though.

Under a U.S. Supreme Court decision, a state cannot force a business to collect sales taxes unless it has a physical presence, or "nexus," in that state.

Without such a requirement, many online retailers balk at having to compute the hodgepodge of local and state sales taxes across the nation. Most customers, in turn, duck their duty to pay the sales tax themselves and most states don’t go after them.

Though Congress could authorize states to collect these taxes for other states, lawmakers have never done so and in fact have approved a moratorium through Nov. 1, 2003, on Internet-only taxes, including a streamlined sales-tax structure that would apply only to e-commerce.

Now, the issue is taking on fresh urgency in state capitals, where last fiscal year governors collectively sliced $13 billion from state programs and are preparing to whack billions more, according to the National Governors Association.

California’s Legislative Analyst’s office concedes the state - which has a projected $35 billion budget deficit - has few options if Congress doesn’t change its tune.

But the state can at least force retailers with stores in California - such as Borders and Barnes & Noble bookstores - to collect taxes on Internet sales to state residents. Those stores currently do so for a few states, but not California.

Two years ago, when the state had a huge surplus, Gov. Gray Davis vetoed a bill with such a requirement, saying it would send the wrong message to an emerging marketing medium and robust job generator.

Now, facing a record shortfall, Internet sales taxes are among many options on his table, Davis spokeswoman Hilary McLean said.

The estimated $200 million from online sales taxes could, for instance, spare a controversial cut that has been proposed: $201.8 million in public health care for the poor. Or revenues could be spread out to reduce the magnitude of cuts in several programs.

Estimates vary widely on how much governments are losing.

One widely cited study by the University of Tennessee says states, cities and counties nationwide lost $13.3 billion in revenue last year from uncollected e-commerce sales taxes.

That’s about 3 percent of total sales tax revenues that year, a percentage projected to increase to 6 percent by 2006. For a handful of states, it could approach 12 percent by 2011.

Another study, for the Utah-based Institute for State Studies, predicted annual losses up to $45 billion by 2006. By that analysis, California last year lost $1.75 billion in revenues, while Texas and New York followed with about $1 billion each.

Many states are trying to make it easier for companies to compute online sales taxes for them.

Utah Tax Commissioner R. Bruce Johnson hopes within a year that at least 10 states will create a simple, single statewide sales tax rate. He has tried to enlist Wyoming, North Dakota, Ohio, Michigan, Florida and North Carolina in his campaign.

Meanwhile, California and other states are feeling pressure to get more aggressive. One coalition of police and fire departments and local chambers of commerce has suggested the state should first collect more sales taxes before raiding city hall treasuries.

China Closes 3,300 Cybercafes

China has closed more than 3,300 Internet cafes in a safety crackdown launched after a fire in June at a Beijing cafe killed 25 people, the official Xinhua News Agency says.

Nearly 12,000 other Internet cafes have been closed temporarily while they make improvements, Xinhua said Thursday.

The fatal fire June 16 in Beijing’s university district came amid complaints by some officials that such businesses were endangering the safety and morals of young people.

Many Internet cafes were unlicensed and had no fire exits or other required safety features. Officials complained that they also gave young people access to pornography and other harmful material online.

The crackdown adds to efforts by the communist government to control how Chinese use the Internet, even as it encourages the spread of online activity for business and education.

Special filters block Web surfers from seeing sites abroad run by Chinese dissidents, human rights groups and news organizations.

Under new rules that took effect Nov. 15, minors are banned from Internet cafes. Managers are required to keep records of customers’ identities and to close by midnight.

Two teenage boys accused of setting the June fire in Beijing were sentenced to life in prison. Authorities said they had argued with cafe employees.

China has tens of millions of Internet users, many of whom until recently relied on cybercafes for access. With the falling price of home computers, however, more small businesses and families can afford their own, and many customers now use cybercafes to play computer games rather than getting online.

Where to Recycle Digital Gear

After you've unwrapped and fired up that new electronic gadget, you have to figure out what to do with the device it replaces. Before you shelve that old phone or notebook alongside your 8-track and Betamax, you might consider properly recycling it instead. It's not tough to protect the environment, help a charity, and possibly get a rebate (or at least a tax write-off).

Returning used PC and communications equipment for reuse gives others the opportunity to gain access to technology. It also helps prevent what the Environmental Protection Agency estimates at about 2 million tons of electronic trash per year from being dumped into U.S. landfills.

Personal efforts are the key. Massachusetts is the only state to ban disposal of certain electronics in its landfills. In September, California governor Gray Davis vetoed a bill that would have made the state the first to assess a $10 recycling fee per electronic product to address the environmental impacts of disposal.

A quick inventory of your electronic assets will help you devise a simple disposal strategy. If you have a new PC and simply want to change systems, you need to make the transition first. Tools are available to help you move your settings and applications onto the new system before discarding the old one.

You can also "recycle" the hard drive from your existing PC by installing it in the new one and using it as a second drive, says Steve Taylor, who runs a one-person consulting business in Greensboro, North Carolina, and can't resist frequently picking up the latest and greatest gear.

"Then, when you dispose of the old PC, you don't have privacy worries, such as someone finding your old e-mail," he notes.

If no family members are clamoring for your electronic hand-me-downs, a number of programs will accept them. The faster you relinquish your used PCs, PDAs, peripherals, and mobile phones, the greater the benefit to the people who inherit them. Year-old technology that seems archaic to you is current enough for most folks who receive refurbished equipment.

Check with your company's facilities department; many have their own recycling programs. Also, most electronics manufacturers have trade-in programs. PC makers Dell, Gateway, Hewlett-Packard, and IBM, for example, all have mail-back programs (Gateway gives you a rebate).

Panasonic, Sharp, and Sony sponsor recycling events. You drop off equipment at a temporary collection site, and these manufacturers will pay to have it recycled.

Third-party organizations such as United Recycling Industries will recycle equipment made by any mix of vendors. You purchase a prepaid shipping label ($27.99 includes delivery and all recycling costs for shipments up to 69 pounds), box up your equipment, and drop your package off at any UPS pickup location.

Californians can leave PCs, peripherals, TVs, printers, copiers, and other devices at Computer Recycling Center locations throughout the state and get a tax credit. The organization refurbishes PCs and donates them to public schools, teachers, and community nonprofit organizations.

Among the easiest items to safely discard are mobile phones, which leak lead, cadmium, and mercury into groundwater and the atmosphere if dumped into the trash. AT&T Wireless, Cingular, Sprint PCS, Verizon Wireless, and other mobile-equipment stores--including RadioShack and Target--have recycling bins where you can pitch your defunct phones. (Be sure to deactivate your service first!)

"You can return any model of phone at any store," notes Eric Forster, a vice president at ReCellular in Ann Arbor, Michigan. ReCellular partners with about 600 organizations to collect used mobile phones, refurbish them, and return them to wireless carriers, which resell them or donate them to charity.

"Even old analog phones are worth turning in," Forster says. "They can be reused by residents of shelters and for inner-city, prepaid services for the next few years." The wireless phone companies are required to keep their analog networks running through 2006.

Often, you'll simply return your old phone when you buy a new one, particularly if the wireless carrier is offering a trade-in discount incentive. But you also might want to consider your pet charity in the process.

For example, Sprint PCS donates a portion of its phone-resale net proceeds to Easter Seals and the National Organization on Disability. Verizon Wireless donates mobile phones, airtime, and money to domestic-violence shelters and prevention programs.

Similarly, the Donate a Phone program, run jointly by the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association and Motorola, donates handsets, preprogrammed with emergency numbers, to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Information on where to mail or drop off the phones is available on the organization's Web site.

Put Your Monitor to Sleep

Does your monitor not get the rest it needs? Users can save $10 to $50 off the cost of running a PC each year by simply activating built-in sleep modes on their monitors, according to the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Most monitors have power management capabilities, also known as sleep mode. During a period of inactivity, the operating system will send a message to the monitor to enter a stand-by mode, run a screen saver, or simply power down.

This pause-in monitor activity saves electricity, and reduces the cost of maintaining a network, according to a group called EnergyStar, run jointly by the DOE and EPA. By simply activating the sleep functions, mail equipment vendor Pitney Bowes was able to save $160,000 annually, the organization said.

But 45 percent of U.S. monitors are workaholics, and don't take advantage of their built-in ability to take naps during their users' lunch hour, EnergyStar said. These insomniac monitors cost companies and other organizations $900 million a year in electricity costs, according to the

group.

In lieu of fast-acting sedatives, EnergyStar has developed software tools to help IT professionals implement the sleep functions on monitors across their networks. Those tools can be downloaded at EnergyStar.gov.

EnergyStar is also known in the U.S. for rating power-friendly consumer appliances such as dishwashers or refrigerators.

EBay Bids for California Town Top $1.6M

A Christmas Day online bidding war breached the minimum bid and further drove up the price on eBay for the entire town of Bridgeville to more than $1.6 million.

By 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, the offer for the town had soared to $1,610,600, well above the reserve price of $775,000.

The tiny town located 260 miles north of San Francisco went on the online auction block Nov. 27. The bidding closes Friday.

Elizabeth Lapple, who has owned Bridgeville since 1985, said she believes the bidding likely will reach $2 million. Lapple said she remains realistic about whether or not the highest bidder will pull through and hopes that whoever eventually buys the town can afford to develop it.

Lapple, who lives in Bridgeville with her husband Joe, estimates it would cost about $200,000 to fix-up the town, where opinion varies on whether the successful bidder would be getting a money pit or a gold mine.

"The reason I’m selling it is that I know I’ll never have that much," Lapple said. "We haven’t really had any trouble finding people who want to buy it, but a lot of people don’t have the money."

The online action was frenetic Wednesday, with unknown bidders lifting the proposed sales price for the town from about $800,000 to nearly double that in just a few hours.

Bridgeville features about 80 acres, with a mile and a half of riverbank on the Van Duzen River, four cabins, nine houses, a cemetery and a backhoe. The listing on eBay boasts that the buyer would get "an entire working town, with shops, woodworking, plumbing, glass and electrical."

EBay spokesman Chris Donlay said it was the first time an entire town has been for sale on eBay.

Bridgeville would make a great location for a bed and breakfast, said postmaster Rose Clarke.

EBay Bidding for Town Closes at $1.8M

The frenzied bidding for a tumbledown Northern California town closed at nearly $1.8 million Friday on eBay.

If the deal goes through, 82 acres of Bridgeville will go to the unidentified buyer who put in a bid for $1,777,877 just seconds before the Internet auction closed.

Bridgeville is the first town to be sold on the Web site, said eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove.

Almost 250 bids were placed during the month that the town was on the electronic auction block.

The town, which owner Elizabeth Lapple acknowledged is a fixer-upper, comes complete with a post office, a mile and a half of riverbank, a cemetery and more than a dozen cabins and houses, occupied mostly by renters. "Your own ZIP code will now be 95526," the eBay description reads.

The town's price went well beyond the specified minimum of $775,000.

Bridgeville is 260 miles north of San Francisco in rural Humboldt County. Lapple and her husband, Joe, have owned the town since 1985.

They said they put the town up for auction because they couldn't afford the estimated $200,000 cost of renovating it.

The scenic community along a tree-shaded bend of the Van Duzen River was promoted on eBay as a potential retreat, money maker or tax shelter.

Joe Lapple said he hopes the new owner will fix up the town, which dates to the 19th century. But the Lapples will not be hanging around to find out; they have bought a new home in Fortuna, about 25 miles away.

"We were just waiting to sell this town and pack up all our stuff and be gone," Joe Lapple said.

Online Shopping Sets Records

Consumers clicked their way to a record in online shopping this holiday season, researchers say. Online spending by consumers hit $1.9 billion last week, up 19 percent from the week before Christmas a year ago, according to researchers at ComScore Networks.

Apparently, many in the United States will be opening home-and-garden gifts over the holiday. That nontravel category was the fastest growing, rising 78 percent in dollar sales over a year ago. It reached $555 million in sales for the period from November 1 until December 20, said ComScore, which is based in Reston, Virginia.

Furniture and appliances were next in growth, up 75 percent from that same period a year ago to hit sales of $171 million this year.

Of course, toys also were a big seller online. Toy purchases totaled $396 million in sales, up 61 percent from the same period in 2001, keeping the category in ComScore's rankings of the fastest-growing types of online sales.

Sports and fitness gear ranked fourth in overall growth, jumping 54 percent to total $233 million worth of sales. Rounding out the top five was the jewelry and watch category at $216 million, up 45 percent over last year's

online sales for the same period.

Among the fastest-growing categories, apparel and accessories was the largest overall seller in dollar terms at $1.4 billion, 31 percent higher than the year-ago period. Consumer electronics also topped the $1 billion mark--though barely--for growth of 21 percent.

Reflecting the technology industry overall, however, computer hardware online holiday sales sagged 1 percent. Still, at $1.63 billion technology products remained the biggest category for dollar sales among the largest major nontravel categories tracked by ComScore. Hardware was followed by apparel and accessories, and then by consumer electronics.

Cumulative online sales for November 1 through December 20 were $12.6 billion, an increase of 29 percent from the year-ago period, with nontravel sales up 23 percent to $8.5 billion and travel sales up 51 percent to $4.1 billion, ComScore found.

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